



General Health Committee - Introduced

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Menstrual Equity Position Statement By: Jessica Moonjely and Isabella O'Connor

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Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council should support requiring public schools to provide free menstrual products in one half of the bathrooms in all public middle and high schools.

Position

It should be the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa's youth, that menstrual products be provided in one half of all public schools with grades 6-12 to improve the health and safety of young women, while receiving their education in Iowa public schools.

Rationale

Every year, millions of girls do not have access to proper sanitary menstrual products. In low-income public schools, this is an imminent problem. As of 2018, 37 percent of Iowa's households could not afford "the basic costs of living," including menstrual products¹. Girls who come from low-income households that cannot afford proper menstrual products do not have access to safe, sanitary products. These young women are skipping class because of the lack of accessibility to products that are essential and are being held back from success². As a result, low-income girls are at risk of missing approximately one week of school each month: 1/4 of the 36-week academic year.

There are also health risks that come with inadequate access to menstrual products. When women have limited access to menstrual products, they are forced to make their resources last longer. However, wearing a tampon more than the 8-hour time limit can cause one to develop an irritation or infection, including the life-threatening complication of Toxic Shock Syndrome. Women are also using unsanitary items such as toilet paper in lieu of these products, which puts them at a higher risk of infection³.

¹ 2018 ALICE Report by United Ways of Iowa

² The Washington Post

³ U.S. National Library of Medicine

Other states are moving towards improving menstrual hygiene in public schools. In 2018, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo enacted a mandate requiring all public schools to provide free tampons and pads in all bathrooms that are accessible to girls in grades 6-12⁴. Public school boards and nurses decided which specific product to purchase for the school district.

These products for women are not required in Iowa school bathrooms despite being an essential part of feminine hygiene, cleanliness, and health. However, toilet paper is required by federal and municipal regulations in bathrooms for sanitary reasons. State governments allocate funds to public schools to provide toilet paper, as it is a necessary part of hygiene and sanitation. It is time that menstrual products are provided in schools as well.

This issue is important because the health of young women is at risk when proper menstrual products are unaffordable for their families. In order for women and girls to thrive in society, they need to be able to have access to proper menstrual products. Not having access to proper menstrual products like tampons, pads or menstrual cups holds young women back in their education.

Funding

Make menstrual products a part of the public school budget. Currently, it is a requirement for Iowa Public School Boards to ensure that there is an adequate amount of toilet paper stocked in public middle and high schools. This budget should include menstrual products as well because just like toilet paper, they too are a necessity for students⁴.

In the 2017-2018 school year, there was an estimated 254,150 students enrolled in grades 6-12⁵. Total enrollment of all grades indicates that 48.6% are female⁵. This means that this proposal would benefit 123,520 eligible students.

Using a separate estimate previously obtained from the Department of Revenue, an annual supply of menstrual products costs \$48⁵. Since school is not necessarily available to students all year, or through the weekends, it is assumed that students might use this supply for roughly half their needs (\$23). It is possible that with time and research, a wholesale cost of products might change as prices fluctuate. However, based on the estimates we currently obtained, the annual costs to school districts for supplying menstrual products for free is estimated at \$2.8 million⁵.

Recommended Action

SIYAC should support the allocation of funds to public schools to provide menstrual products for free, in half of the bathrooms at schools with grades 6-12. Menstrual products include tampons and pads. The State of Iowa and Iowa Public School Boards have an obligation to the future of our state to do all that is necessary to ensure every student in Iowa has access to safe, sanitary menstrual products to ensure a successful education and a healthy student population.

Regards,

Health Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

⁴ The Washington Post

⁵ Legislative Services Agency

